

Street and social media promotion

CASE: Gymnaestrada 2015

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| <p>This thesis is a case study research of the case organization Voimisteluliitto (the Finnish Gymnastics Federation). In more detail it analyses the promotion process for Gymnaestrada 2015, a huge gymnastics festival that is held in Helsinki in summer of 2015. The organization and the festival are introduced in the first part of the thesis.</p> <p>The empirical part was completed during summer 2014 and it consisted of the process or organising a street promotion event as well as producing content to the social media channels of Gymnaestrada 2015.</p> <p>The research was conducted as a case study research and the goal was to analyse the different promotional tools and their suitability in different situations, as well as to participate in the promotion process. Observation was used as the main research tool in the case study.</p> <p>In the theoretical part of the research the different promotional tools, street promotion, Guerrilla marketing and social media, are examined and the theoretical frame of reference for the thesis is created.</p> <p>The results of the research support the theories about street promotion and social media promotion. The information acquired through observation show the importance of planning and preparing, but also how the organizers must be able to adapt the made plans to the actual situation to reach the maximum potential.</p> | |
| Keywords Event promotion, street promotion, social media, Guerrilla marketing, gymnastics | |

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1 Introduction

The Finnish Gymnastics Federation, Voimisteluliitto in Finnish, was chosen as the research organization because of my own experience in gymnastics. I have done aesthetic group gymnastics for almost ten years and also have been a gymnastics coach for about 5 years. For these reasons I become particularly interested when Voimisteluliitto was searching for volunteers and thesis makers for the upcoming international gymnastics festival, Gymnaestrada, which will be organized in summer 2015 in Helsinki. I thought this would be a great opportunity to complete my thesis in a field that I am especially interested.

Voimisteluliitto needed help in particular to organize a promotional event one year before the festival itself. I saw this as an opportunity to take advantage of my skills and know how in marketing, and also as a chance to research the practices and processes of event promotion in different forms. I have also been interested in event organizing as I want to take use of the theoretical skills acquired through my studies. I thought this would be a great opportunity for that. When we discussed my role in the project, I also suggested I could be working with the social media marketing, as it would make an interesting subject for this thesis. This is how the topic of my thesis started to formulate.

1.1 Objectives of the thesis and definition of the scope

My personal objectives with this thesis were versatile. On one hand, I wanted to participate in organizing the most important event in the field of gymnastics. I have never been able to attend this event before, so it would be great this time to be also participating in the organizing part. On the other hand I wanted to learn more about the marketing aspect of a big-scale sports festival, and to closely observe the methods used for the promotion for this event.

From to point of view of Voimisteluliitto, the objectives were for me to help them organize the promotional event, and to also participate in the social media marketing for the upcoming event, in order to increase people's awareness about the event, and that way help make the festival more successful when it comes to the number of participants.

The part of this thesis where I analyse the use of different kinds of promotion methods and their successfulness in this particular work, the actual research part, is for my personal objectives and learning experience for the most part. I do not produce any guidelines for Voimisteluliitto for future use. First, I thought that might be useful, but after considering,

decided it would not be of any use for them. This festival is organized only once every four years, and every time in a different European country, so it is not even certain it will ever be held in Finland again. This way those guidelines would either be hopelessly outdated, or would never even be needed. They wouldn't be that well applicable for Voimisteluliitto's other events either, as this is a far bigger scale event than any of the national events they organize normally.

This thesis, however, might be used by other organizations that are planning to organize an international, big-scale sports festival or event in Finland. Also, this study might be of use for future thesis makers in universities of applied sciences, who are making their thesis in the field of event promotion.

Considering event promotion, this thesis only handles two different promotional tools. This was due to the fact that these were the two promotion channels that Voimisteluliitto needed help with at the time. Also, I believe that narrowing it down to these two tools makes it easier to find some similarities and differences between them, as opposed to comparing several different promotional tools.

1.2 Research questions and research method

My research questions were formulated according to the tasks I got from Voimisteluliitto. I was thinking about the process and realized I could use these different tasks – the promotional event organizing and participating in social media marketing – as a chance to compare different ways of promotion methods in event promotion. I decided to analyse the successfulness of these two promotional tools for different objectives. So, my basic question is “what is the most effective way of promoting a big scale sports festival, Gymnaestrada?” and also “how to decide a promotion?”.

This thesis is executed as a procedural case study for the Finnish Gymnastics Federation. The procedural part consists of implementing the promotional event for Gymnaestrada 2015 and also to participate in the social media promotion during this project. The promotional event took place in July of 2014, and I started working with it a month before, in June 2014. This was also the period of time when I participated in the social media promotion, and all my observations and results are based on the work completed during this time.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

In the first part of the thesis the case organization and the case event is introduced. This includes a brief history of Gymnaestrada as well as the introduction of the current situation and objectives. After that it moves to the theoretical part, which covers the framework for the thesis. Event promotion in general is introduced, as well as the latest evolution and trends in event promotion. Also, the particular fields of promotion viewed in this thesis are gone through specifically. In chapter four the research methods are gone through in detail.

After that the empirical part starts with introducing the planning processes and implementation of the promotion process. The two different promotional tools, the street promotion and social media, are analyzed separately to make the understanding of the process as easy as possible. The last part of this thesis consists of the discussion and conclusions, as well as the analysis of the reliability of the research and the personal learning experience.

2 The case organization and event

The organization I worked with is Suomen Voimisteluliitto, The Finnish Gymnastics Federation. Gymnaestrada 2015 is an international gymnastics event organized by the Finnish Gymnastics Federation in co-operation with several partners.

2.1 Suomen Voimisteluliitto

Suomen Voimisteluliitto (Finnish Gymnastics Federation) is one of the largest Finnish sports federations with around 380 member clubs and more than 100 000 members. Even though the federation in its current form started its operations in 2005, the roots go all the way to the 1870's, when the first gymnastics federation for men was established in Helsinki. After this many different federations were established, and in the end they decided to unite their operations and the outcome was the Finnish Gymnastics Federation. (Voimisteluliitto, 2014)

Voimisteluliitto is the most important educator of gymnastics coaches and trainers, and it arranges courses for more than 4 000 participants annually. It is a nationwide federation with operations in six different areas that cover Finland from the south all the way to the north (Etelä-Suomi, Länsi-Suomi, Pohjanmaa, Pohjois-Suomi, Savo-Karjala ja Sydän-Suomi). (Voimisteluliitto, 2014)

The member clubs include teams and gymnasts from different kinds of gymnastics, such as acrobatics, group gymnastics, aerobic, artistic gymnastics (for both men and women), TeamGym, rhythmic gymnastics and trampoline gymnastics. There are both teams that aim for international competitions, as well as teams that focus more on enjoying themselves and do not have such high goals. (Voimisteluliitto, 2014)

2.2 History of Gymnaestrada

Gymnaestrada (also called the World Gymnaestrada) is an international gymnastics exhibition. It is the largest gymnastics event in the world, and it is held every four years, much like the Olympics. It takes place during the summer, and has developed from a four day event to lasting a whole week. Until today it has only been held inside Europe, but participants come from all around the world. (World Gymnaestrada 2015a)

It was held for the first time in 1953 in Rotterdam, Netherlands, with around 5 000 participants. After that the number of participants has gradually been increasing, the current record being Lisbon in 2003 with 25 000 participants. There are people from every age group and all the fields of gymnastics possible. The participants have prepared performances to show their talents and to introduce their own culture for other gymnastics and also to the audience. These performances take place in different locations throughout the hosting city. (World Gymnaestrada 2015a)

There are also large scale mass performances that can include hundreds, even thousands, gymnasts at the same time. These choreographies have been learned worldwide with the help of videos, and also with certain group of people from different countries coming together and learning it, and the going back to their home countries to teach it to others. These mass performances are held usually at big stadiums, and are a unique opportunity to see this kind of a huge international performance. (World Gymnaestrada 2015a)

Gymnaestrada is not about winning medals: there are no winners or losers. It is about celebrating the people's love for the sport, and to come together and enjoy the amazing performances. It is about raising the awareness of this special sport and to inspire people to join it. Gymnaestrada is also a unique opportunity to meet people from around the world that share the same passion. For many people it is also a chance to meet with dear friends you maybe have not seen in years.

2.3 Gymnaestrada 2015

The World Gymnaestrada in 2015 will be held in Helsinki on 12-18 of July. This will be the first time for Finland to host the festival. It will be a seven day festival with participants from all over the world. According to the pre-registrations more than 25 000 participants from 50 different countries are expected, so this might become the biggest festival in the history of Gymnaestradas, the biggest so far being 25 000 participants in Lisbon in 2003. (World Gymnaestrada 2015b).

From the point of view of the Finnish Gymnastics Federation, this means a huge amount of work that has to be completed before the event. They work in co-operation with the State of Finland and the City of Helsinki, and venues for the performances include some of the biggest venues in Helsinki, such as the Helsinki Ice Hall and the Olympic Stadium. The federation has acquired numerous partners and work with for example the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE and HSL, the Helsinki Regional Transport. (World Gymnaestrada 2015b).

The Gymnaestrada 2015 consists of the following parts:

- Opening Ceremony
 - The Grand Opening much like in the Olympics
- Group Performances
 - Groups of 10 or more from different countries have prepared their own performances
- Large Group Performances
 - Outdoor performances with 200 to 1 000 performers, the spectacular specialty of World Gymnaestradas
- National Evenings
 - Evening galas for one country at a time
- FIG Gala
 - A two hour spectacle with performances chosen by FIG (International Gymnastics Federation).
- Closing Ceremony

(World Gymnaestrada 2015c)

Gymnaestrada 2015 is a non-profit event, which instead of financial benefit aims to provide experiences and enjoyment for the gymnastics community in particular. According to their official website the participation is for everybody, regardless of gender, age, race,

religion, culture, ability or social standing. It is a non-competitive event, and has actually become more like a festival. The main financier of the event is the Finnish Gymnastics Federation. Also, participants pay for an entrance fee to the event, which help to cover the costs of the event. (World Gymnaestrada 2015d; Niemi, E. 18 Jun 2014.)

Because of the restricted financing, most of the work is done by volunteers. Apart from the core coordinating committee and staff of around twenty people, everything else is being done by volunteer workers. The Finnish Gymnastics Federation offers for example opportunities for students to complete their work placement or to produce their thesis based on the project. This was the situation for me as well – I did not get any compensation for my work. However, this opportunity for me was not about that, but about being able to participate in this unique opportunity of Gymnaestrada finally being organized in Finland. (Niemi, E. 18 Jun 2014.)

Many, if not all, of the volunteers are former, or current, gymnasts themselves, or have been closely following gymnastics for a long time. In my experience they all share a passion for the sport, which is why it is possible to make all this happen with a very little budget, at least compared to other festivals of the same scale. This is crucial, as the State of Finland does not support gymnastics nearly as well as for example ice hockey, even though Finnish groups have been successful in international competitions. (World Gymnaestrada 2015d; Niemi, E. 18 Jun 2014.)

2.4 Current situation and objectives

As there is still almost one year to go until Gymnaestrada 2015, the promotion for it maybe is not yet in its full swing. However, many things are being done already to make the event as successful as possible. This event has its own specialties compared to for example some music festivals held every summer in Finland. Gymnaestrada is extremely well-known among the gymnastics society, but in contrast, very poorly known by anybody else.

The situation before I started working with the project was that almost all information available had already been promoted through the channels in the field of gymnastics: the FIG (the International Gymnastics Federation) had released information internationally to Gymnastics Federations around the world, the Finnish Gymnastics Federation had informed its member clubs and urged them to promote the event to their members. Also, as the event is held every four years, during the past three years already the upcoming festival in Finland has been promoted in different gymnastics events. (Niemi, E. 18 Jun 2014).

As discussed with Niemi, the next step in the promotion process would be engaging also people outside the gymnastics community, and especially the citizens of Helsinki, as that will be the event location. This decision was taken, as gymnastics still is a very niche sport, and it would be maybe a little bit too ambitious to expect participants with no special interest towards it to travel for the event from around Finland.

The situation in the social media promotion was a little bit different. The event still did not have its own Twitter account when I joined the project. They did have a Facebook page, and the aim was to make the "One year to go" –milestone visible in social media as well. (Niemi, E. 18 Jun 2014.)

3 Event promotion

Event promotion can be understood in different ways depending on the context, but also depending on the reader. In the interest of this thesis the concepts used in the text are here defined and introduced briefly.

3.1 What is an event and what is event promotion?

In a wide perspective we could say that everything is an event: when we wake up in the morning and make coffee, it is a chain of actions that could be defined as an "event". However, in this context event is defined as an occurrence that takes place in a determined time and place and involves other people as well. Event is something that is planned before hand and has significance to its participants. According to Stevens (2005, 4-5) events can be divided into three groups: trade shows, corporate events and other events. In this case the event type is not a trade show nor a corporate event, but something that falls under the 'other events'.

Allen, O'Toole, Harris & McDonnell (2005, 10-11) use the term *special events* to describe events that do not fit the description of corporate events or events that aim to boost brands and products. One characteristic that these special events share is that they aim to mark special occasions or achieve particular social or cultural goals and objectives (Allen et al. 2005, 11-15). These special events include festivals and sports events, which is why in this particular thesis the event type can be defined as a special event.

From the point of view of this research, it is important also to understand the difference between event promotion and events as a marketing tool. Many times when talking about events in a business context, we talk about how to promote a product or a brand through organizing an event. In this case study the event itself the gymnastics festival is the "product" or the "brand" that is being promoted.

3.2 The evolution of event marketing

The field of marketing has been evolving rapidly during the last decades. Preston calls this evolution *consumer socialization*: as we are shifting towards an experience economy, where experiences matter more than products, consumers will socialize and start to associate themselves with certain types of events that are influenced by culture and media. This leads to a situation where most, if not all, of our consumption decisions are based on our interaction with other people, especially people we relate to or wish we could associ-

ate with. (Preston, 2012, 34). Also making the events industry delicate, as Allen et al. (2005, 184) put it, the delivery and consumption of an event are inseparable: the event is consumed at the same time that it is produced, which makes the room for errors even smaller.

Consumer socialization is most often linked with young people and their integration into the consumer economy. They use marketing as a way to learn about the social interaction, and to make decisions about what ways of consumption are relevant for them to have the social stand they desire. They use it to find out about brands and events and what they could add to their lives. For example participating to an event means not only satisfying his or her personal interest, but also an opportunity for social expression. (Preston, 2012, 34-35)

The basic element of marketing, though, has not really changed. It is all about finding out what people want, and providing them with it. But increasingly as important is also knowing how people communicate, and how they want to communicate in the future (Preston, 2012, 47.) As the economy is shifting towards an experience economy, and most brands and events aim to offer experiences and emotions instead of just products and services, it is even more personal for the consumers. In the information society that we live in, if the consumer are not satisfied, they will most certainly let other people know about it. Technology is of course playing a huge part in this, but it is also a lot about the peoples' need to interact with each other and to feel connected to something bigger.

3.3 Target market

In this research the target market refers to the people who would be coming to a particular event. In order to choose the right promotion channel, it is crucial to define the types of people your event is appealing to, and from there to more specifically define the target market. The target can be really specific or it can consist of many different targets that together form the potential audience for your event. In case of multiple targets, it is usually recommended, or even inevitable, to use multiple channels of promotion, as the different targets might not react to the same channel. (Preston, 2012, 157-158)

As Shone and Parry (2013, 197) point out, the main issue from the festival promotion point of view is how much is actually known about the potential target market, and can that information be used in the marketing process. As mentioned above, there can be several targets, and Shone and Parry also underline that it is a mistake to think that there can only be one target; the larger the event, the more likely it is to attract a more diverse

range of audience. There can also be other stakeholders, not necessarily attendees that have to be taken into consideration from the promotion and marketing point of view.

Some questions to consider could be:

- Is the event targeted to the general public or a specific group?
- What sort of age or life style segment will the event appeal to?
- Where does most of the target market live?
- From how far away will people come to the event?

(Shone and Parry, 2013, 197-198).

3.4 Festival promotion

Festivals are a special kind of event, and differ quite a lot from many events in the field of business. Of course, festivals can also act as a promotional tool for a brand or a product, but as Preston puts it (2012, 138) festivals are more often important to the attendees as such, and are a way to express identity and community. Today's festivals cover a wide range of fields, but the thing they have in common is that they are usually concerned with activities that people find worth celebrating (Preston, 2012, 142). Allen et al. (2005, 14) define festivals as events that are an important expression of human activity.

Festivals create common and shared experiences and have through time been a way to bring people together and create a culture. Preston (2012, 138) also describes festivals as an excuse for togetherness – the attendees do not have to justify why they are spending time together; the festival kind of takes the responsibility for that.

So, what does this mean for festival promotion? Of course, the promotion has to reflect all these special aspects of festivals. Even though one might think that every festival is so unique that it is impossible to have any guidelines, Preston reminds that in most cases they are not that unique after all. More important than the star attraction or even the cause of the event might be the marketers ability to motivate attendees – which can depend on factors such as location, cost, competition and media.

It also matters if the festival is being organized for the first time or if it's already an established (maybe annual etc.) event. If it is the prior, it means that the marketer has to first educate the public about the festival. This requires the use of ideally varied promotional channels to really get the message through. With established events the marketing strategy is a little different, and not that much time and effort has to be put in to the promotion process. (Preston, 2012, 148).

During the past years festivals have also become more and more related with tourism, as travelling has become more affordable. According to Goldblatt (2005, 13) festivals provide unlimited opportunities for organizations to celebrate their culture. They also provide meaningful experiences for those who participate and attend. In this particular case the touristic aspect could also be considered, as attendees are expected from all around the world. This kind of special event could be a great way to introduce people to everything Finland, and Helsinki, have to offer for tourists outside this particular event. For this reason I believe the city of Helsinki is quite strongly participating in the organizing of Gymnaestrada.

3.4.1 Social media

Social media today seems to be the first, and for some the only, marketing communication channel a brand, product or event needs to have in order to succeed. Why is online promotion so important? Preston (2012, 112) implies that social networks have become an established practice and are very much the norm. As some years ago promotion through social networks might have been considered as innovative and unique, clearly that is not the case anymore.

As having a Facebook page or a Twitter account has become more or less the norm for any business these days, in order to differentiate one has to do something *new*. According to Macy & Thompson (2011, 1-2) that something new is real-time marketing in social media. The reason why real-time is so exciting, is that people can communicate what they are doing at that very moment, and they can communicate that to their neighbour or someone on the other side of the planet. For marketers this means a way to deliver information faster than any other media. Also the message they want to communicate can be targeted to certain consumers with laser accuracy, to reach the maximum potential. (Macy & Thompson, 2011, 2).

Of all event types, festivals are the ones strongest relying on social media promotion, and according to Preston (2012, 158) especially social networking is a natural way to promote festivals, as actually, festivals themselves are a way of social networking. It is the technology that has more and more connected social networking with social media – if it wasn't for the internet, people would still create networks, only in a different environment. As Preston (2012, 158) summarises, the need for networking comes from the basic needs of human beings as social animals.

3.4.2 Street promotion and Guerrilla marketing

As social media has become more and more popular as a promotional tool, it might be smart to think about other, a bit more 'out-of-the-box' ways to promote an event. As mentioned above, festivals are a special kind of event, and require, even more than other events, creative promotion.

Guerrilla marketing is a great way of doing something unconventional. It relies a lot in imagination, and one of the most important features is the element of surprise: doing something in a context where people would not expect it to happen. Most Guerrilla marketing also aims to be memorable and more personal than the more traditional ways to promote an event. In this context even social media could be considered as a traditional marketing channel. Guerrilla marketing is also many times relatively low cost compared to its impact, which is why it is suitable for small businesses or other organizations with a low budget. (Entrepreneur, 2010)

Levinson & Hanley (2005, 27-28) have a great reminder of *why* guerrilla marketing would be the right tool to choose:

“You are not marketing products.
You are not marketing services.
You are not marketing your organisation.
You are selling feelings.”

Street promotion could be defined as Guerrilla marketing, if it's imaginative, creatively executed and has the element of surprise. It also needs to be noteworthy and interesting, otherwise all the effort will go to waste. Street promotion can be a useful tool, but it has to be carefully prepared and planned, as there are so many factors that influence the outcome – factors that the marketer might have no power over. Those factors could be for example weather, or outside influence, as street promotion, as the name suggests, usually take place in public spaces. (Preston, 2012, 150)

The target market could also be a problem with street promotion: it is impossible to guarantee that the people who happen to be in the location you have chosen will be interested in your event. To get people interested, free give-aways are one thing to consider, as people always love to get things for free. However, the 'freebies' should have some connection to your event. (Preston, 2012, 150).

4 Research methods

To clarify the choices made concerning the research methods used in this thesis, the methods and their suitability to this kind of research is here explained.

4.1 Procedural research

This research is conducted as a procedural thesis using case study as research method. The procedural part includes the planning, implementation and analysis of the Gymnaestrada 2015 –promotion process in the summer of 2014. The process consisted of a promotional tour, the street promotion and producing content for social media channels Facebook and Twitter. This process is gone through step by step and the outcome is the tour that took place 12 July and the material on social media.

The main qualitative research method during the process was observation. As Daymond and Holloway propose (2002, 202) observation is the fundamental base of all research methods. However, observation as a research method is more than how it is understood in the everyday language. According to Daymond and Holloway (2002, 202) it involves the systematic and ethical recording of the things you see while ‘in the field’.

In this particular research observation consists of observations of the promotional tour, during which observation notes were taken (Attachmen 2), as well as observing the reactions of the audience in social media. In social media observation also some quantitative research methods were used, as the number of likes, shares or comments were observed. The reason why observation was chosen as the main tool, and not for example questionnaires or group interviews, was due to the type of promotion we were doing: the street promotion consisted of the truck touring around Helsinki, and it would not have been possible to stop for handing the questionnaires to the audience and to wait for them to be returned.

Also some informal interviews were used as a method to collect data. These interviews were mainly conversations with other participants in the process, for example the Communication Manager Sanna Yli-Patola and the Project Manager Eevakaisa Niemi, who was the person in charge of all the practical arrangements. These conversations took place during and right after the promotion process, and consisted of discussion about the success of the process as well as exchanging development ideas for the future.

4.2 Case study

A case study is a versatile approach to a research. It can consist of many different kinds of information gathering, and for that reason is not really a research method, but more like a certain type of approach to a study, or a strategy that defines the process from beginning to the end. In a case study, as the name suggests, one or more cases are studied in order to gain the information desired. Different ways to gather that information are for example written documents, observation (passive and participating), questionnaires, interviews and other sources. The mix of different kinds of data collection methods allows the researcher to get a more in-depth understanding about the case. (Eriksson and Koistinen, 2005, 4; Kananen 2013, 77-78)

The real question is *when* to choose a case study as your research strategy? Some guidebooks give the following instructions:

A case study might be the right strategy when one or more of the following criteria are met:

- The researcher has only a little control over the process
- Only a little empirical research has been made on the topic
- The research object is a current real-life phenomenon

(Eriksson and Koistinen, 2005, 5)

Some of the most typical case studies are projects and development for different organizations. Defining the case, or cases, is one of the crucial steps in case studies. The author makes the definition and decides which aspects will be analysed and which will be left out of the research. It is clear that for one research project usually not everything can be included. These decisions about defining the case or cases should be explained by the author. The defined case should support the research objectives.

(Eriksson and Koistinen, 2005, 5)

There might also be some problems with case studies. As Simons states in her book (2009, 162) case studies have often been criticized about being 'too subjective'. Some say that the outcome cannot be a reliable research, because the evidence is gathered subjectively and the author's own opinions and attitudes have an effect on the results. But, as Simons clarifies, subjectivity is not necessarily a negative thing. Also, subjectivity is something that cannot be erased in any event – how could someone do a research without having their own thinking? So, as long as it is acknowledged that there is the matter of subjectivity, it will not decrease the reliability of the research.

(Simons, 2009, 163)

In this particular thesis case study was chosen as it seemed to be the best way to benefit from the work done with Voimisteluliitto. As mentioned in the beginning of this work, the initial plan was to create a comprehensive marketing communication plan for Gymnaestrada. This, however, turned out to be impossible as most of the work had already been done. At this point the idea of a case study occurred: by observing the different promotional methods and comparing it to theoretical information this process would make a great learning process for myself as well as being a good opportunity to observe the practical work of promoting an event.

5 Implementation of the promotional event and social media promotion

This project was implemented with a tight schedule during the summer of 2014. The promotional event was held on July 12th and I was working with the social media promotion from start of July to the end of July. These projects were to complete simultaneously, which was quite convenient as the promotional event would also produce material for the social media promotion.

5.1 Receiving the assignment

When I joined the organizing team, most of the planning for the promotional event had already been done. Also, the Gymnastics Federation had already hired a Communication Manager who was mainly in charge of all activities in social media. My tasks consisted therefore mainly of the practical arrangements for the event. I would also be the one implementing the promotional event itself, by being the project leader during the event. This way my tasks could be even broader, as I would be in charge of any problems we would have during the day.

I was also working with the communication manager and helped her to make a communication plan for the day of the promotional event. She was the one who made the final decisions, but they were based on my suggestions for the most part.

The schedule of the organization of the promotional event was tight, and decisions were made fast. This way even though the planning had been done already when I joined, there were still many things to consider and decisions to be made. For this reason the plans for both the promotional event and the social media promotion would constantly change according to the reality of what can be accomplished in a short time period.

From my point of view as a researcher this turned out to be a bit of a challenge, as I would not be sure if the project will in the end be suitable for producing my thesis based on it. For example, if we didn't have time to concentrate on the social media promotion at all, I couldn't analyse it, and would be left with the promotional event only. Or maybe we would have had to cancel the event entirely if we didn't get the supplies we needed on time. For this reason the planning process was quite complicated, as we had to go by what we had time for.

5.2 “One year to go” –street promotion

“One year to go” was the name of the street promotion event for Gymnaestrada 2015. It was based on the fact that there is exactly one year to go until the grand event. The promotion consisted of a truck tour around the city centre of Helsinki and a promotional dance performed in different locations in the area during Saturday July 12th from 11 am until 2 pm. The promotional dance had already been introduced in gymnastics events during the spring, but would now be used more widely as a promotional tool.

To be successful this street promotion needed some kind of a twist to it. As already discussed earlier, this kind of Guerrilla marketing has to have the element of surprise in order to be memorable. Also, creativity and using imagination are important to create a personal experience. However, in addition to these factors the promotion should also be informative and noteworthy in order to reach the set goals, which is why a professional commentator was hired to deliver our message to the audience.

The original idea was loosely based on the truck tours organized by high school seniors every year before their graduations (abirekka-ajelu in Finnish). This is when they rent out trucks for their own high school, decorate them according to their own liking (usually humorous texts etc.) and cruise around the city (whichever city they are located in) and throw candies to people. Most of the time they also try to be as loud as possible, to attract attention and to celebrate their upcoming graduation. This was to create the needed twist: people would not expect anyone doing this outside the certain time period in February when the high school seniors perform their own truck drives.

This was chosen as the basic idea, as we thought it would be the best way to attract attention and also simply because we needed a way to transport the dance group between locations.

5.2.1 Objectives of the street promotion

The objective of this promotional truck tour was mainly to bring the festival to the attention of the citizens of Helsinki. As the target group is so wide, this method was thought to be the most effective one. The main message of the tour was to tell that there is a huge gymnastics festival coming to *your* city next summer, come and join the fun. Also, one aim was simply to promote gymnastics in general, and by combining it with the truck tour, that people usually associate with the happy and cheerful high school students, creating a youthful and fun image for gymnastics.

5.2.2 Planning process

As stated before, the basic idea of the promotional event had already been invented before my input. However, all the details were still to be decided. One of the most important things to decide was the route of the truck and the locations where the dance would be performed. I had to take into consideration many factors: at what time will there be most people around on a summer Saturday? In which locations they will be and is there a place for the dance performance there?

The planning process was going on simultaneously with the execution, which made it a little bit challenging. For example, before the route and stops were decided, the truck company would already need the information for their driver. What made it more complicated was that all decisions had to be confirmed with the project leader before the final decision.

5.2.3 Permissions and legal issues

For a public event, which our promotional tour was, many permissions and legal aspects needed to be considered. First of all, we had to inform the police about our intention to arrange this kind of event. One of their concerns was the safety issues of the truck. The sides had to be high enough, so that the dancers would be safe during the drive. Our first idea was for the girls to perform the dance on the truck, but this had to be abandoned as nobody would be able to see them due to the high sides.

Another issue was the music. There are some regulations about how loud you can play music in public places. For us the biggest concern was the fact that the dance performance needed to have music, or otherwise they could not perform. Also, we wanted to play the music during the truck drive, but were told that it would only be possible with really low volume. We weren't given really specific answers, basically just that we were not allowed to cause any excess disorder with our music.

The rules of the road were also discussed closely with the police. We tried to get a special permission to park the truck in some unusual places, such as market places and parks. We were not given any permission to do this, and were instructed to follow the regular rules of the road. For us this was one of the issues why we thought we might have to change the plan entirely. We made a plan B, which meant that if we could not stop at the places we wanted to, we would park the truck somewhere and then walk to the planned

places for the dance performance. However, this created a problem with the music, would it be heard all the way from the parking lot?

These permission issues created a lot of uncertainty with the planning and executing of the promotional tour.

5.2.4 Practical arrangements

As mentioned above, the arrangements were made at the same time with the planning. The truck company we used was extremely flexible, and they really answered to all our needs, and were actually one of the things why the tour in the turned out as a success. The route and stops covered for example these places:

- Central Railway Station
- Hakaniemi Marketplace
- Hietalahti Marketplace
- Linnanmäki

The route and all stops in detail can be found in the attachments (Attachment 1).

The market places were chosen, as many people gather at those places during weekends to enjoy for example a coffee or just each other's company. The issue we first had with the marketplaces was the matter of space: would we have enough to stop the truck and for the dance group to do their dance? This is where the truck driver became our saviour: he was a driver with years of experience in driving in the city centre. He simply drove in the middle of the market place. Even though we were given strict instructions from the police to follow the general rules of the road (which means no parking in market places) the truck driver assured this was acceptable.

For the success of our truck tour this was crucial: it had been one of our biggest worries that we could not park the truck close enough to the crowds. This would have meant losing a lot of the appeal of the truck. If we had only walked to the area and performed the dance it wouldn't have been so noticeable and the promotional objectives could not be met that well. Some other ways to grab peoples' attention were the decorations on the truck and the music we played during the drive. The truck was covered in Gymnaestrada 2015 – signs and all the dance group members, as well as all the organisers, were wearing the official Gymnaestrada 2015 – shirts. The truck had two large speakers to play the music for the dance performance. Those speakers were also used to play music during

the drive in order to create the 'party atmosphere' and to attract attention. Also the commentator who presented the dance group and also told basic facts about Gymnaestrada every time we stopped the truck was heard through the speakers.



Picture 1. The promotional truck with some of the dancers

Linnanmäki, the amusement park in Helsinki, was a clear choice as it is one of the partners of the Finnish Gymnastics Federation in the Gymnaestrada 2015 project.



Picture 2. The promotional dance performed in Linnanmäki

5.3 Social media promotion

The main channel for the social media promotion for Gymnaestrada 2015 is the official Facebook page. Even though by the time I joined the project there was still more than one year to go until the event, the Facebook page was already being used regularly, with posts almost daily. They did not yet have a Twitter account, and it was one of the objectives for us to create that during my participation.

The objective of the social media promotion in this case was to remind all followers about the event and to bring it to the attention of other social media users that are not yet familiar with the upcoming gymnastics festival. Most of the content is posted in English, to also involve all the international followers and possible participants. Spanish is also being used in some cases, to take into consideration the followers and participants from Spanish speaking countries. Social media is the easiest and most convenient way to communicate when the target group is scattered around the world.

In the planning phase the intention was to take use of real-time communication with the audience. As mentioned in the theoretical part of this thesis, real-time marketing is *the* trend in social media promotion at the moment. This would be a great way to reach our target consumers in the most efficient way, and to link them with the relevant and ongoing dialogue about Gymnaestrada. Also, this would create the feeling of togetherness to our followers abroad. This feeling of belonging to something bigger is what people crave for even more and more, as already stated in the theory part of this work.

5.3.1 The Facebook page

Most of the Facebook promotion during my participation consisted of the material about the promotional tour. One of the things the communication manager of the project emphasized was that all content should be somehow relevant and interesting to the audience: you cannot post non-sense things about your event just to bring it to their attention. The people simply will not want to follow your page if there are only boring and uncreative posts. This is why the promotional tour was seen as a great opportunity to get meaningful content to social media: it is something concrete that is actually being done now to contribute to the festival.

The posts to Facebook about the promotional tour also had another objective: to give a picture about Helsinki in general and to make it more real for the possible participants –

this would be the actual venue where this huge festival will be held. It was also better to introduce the city already, as it would be harder to imagine the event in a wintery Helsinki. During summer it created a more truthful picture about what it will really look like in Helsinki when they arrive.

The actual content in Facebook consisted of posts with pictures and information of the event (e.g. the anticipated amount of participants) and also a brief introduction of the promotional tour and what it was all about. We also uploaded one video of the promotional dance with a welcome message.

In addition to the content about the promotional tour, during my participation also a "Best Picture" –competition was held on Facebook. The idea was for the followers to send us their own pictures that somehow relate to Gymnaestrada. Around the same time with the promotional tour, the winner of the competition was announced based on the number of 'likes' they got through Facebook. The objective of this was to involve the Facebook followers to share their own experience and, again, to create meaningful and intriguing content – what else would be more exciting than to have your own experiences shared with people with the same passion.

5.3.2 The Twitter -account

The Twitter –account was created in the morning of the promotional tour, not that it was created specifically for the tour, but that way there would be some content to add immediately and would seem more expedient. Due to the restricted period of time of my participation in the project, most of the content in Twitter also consisted of the material about the promotional tour.

The Twitter –account is also entirely in English in order to appeal to all the international participants. Of course it is also for the Finnish followers, but as most of the updates are quite simple and straight forward, a decision was made that there is no need to translate them into Finnish, as most Finnish followers will certainly understand the posts. Also, in Twitter particularly, pictures play a major role, so the content can be understood even if the text isn't completely.

5.3.3 Real-time communication and its challenges

The ways to use social media for promotional purposes seem to be almost endless. It is not enough anymore to only have a Facebook page that you update once or twice a week,

but to get your audience to participate and interact with your brand, product, or in this case, event. This is in one hand an outcome from the simple fact that people need and want to interact with others, and in other hand, a way for brands to become a part of peoples' communication and lifestyles even more intensively.

One way to get your audience to interact is the use of real-time communication. It can mean, for example, marketers tweeting from an event that is somehow relevant for the target market, and this way engaging them into sharing and commenting the subject. When people feel that a brand participates in events that are of their interest, the brand becomes more relevant in their lives. Also, when they feel that the brand is something more than just products – something to communicate and share ideas with – it adds value, and that is in the end the main goal.

In the case of Gymnaestrada and the promotional tour, real-time communication was used both in Facebook and Twitter. In Facebook frequent posts about what was happening during the day were made. The posts contained for example pictures from the places we visited with texts like "Come join us in Hietsu" etc. to try and make people engaged and get them moving. One point in this was also to introduce places in Helsinki to the attendees from other countries, and to engage them also to the things happening, as they could not follow us at the place.

In Twitter we also used some real-time tweeting, or as many sources put it, live tweeting, in the form of short posts with pictures capturing the feeling of the day, for example "selfies" taken by the dancers during the truck drive. However, we really wanted to use live-tweeting even more, to get people talking and sharing, but as we noticed during the day, it was quite inconvenient to try to post everything on time, as we had a lot going on with the tour itself. In Attachment 2 you can see the original plan for our live-tweeting for the day, but in the end we only managed to implement a part of it.

6 Discussion

Being a part of the Gymnaestrada 2015 –project has been a real learning experience for me. Also, it was a great opportunity to research the suitability of different promotional tools for different goals. The nature of the event, a sports festival, brings its own twist to the game, as it is not a typical ‘brand’ or ‘product’ that is being promoted, but a week-long festival. And from the point of view of the promotion process, it is actually ‘selling’ people the opportunity to be a part of an amazing, once-in-a-lifetime experience.

The real question in this particular promotion process was how to make people who do not know what Gymnaestrada is see the event as we (the ‘gymnastics people’) see it: a real festival filled with joy of sports, sharing emotion and being a part of something bigger. As has been gone through in this thesis, these are really the things people these days crave for: participation, interaction and sharing - how to make the audience see this event exactly as the way to achieve what they want? In the next chapters the results and their validity is analysed.

The interpretation of the results in this kind of qualitative case study research is not quite as straight forward as in quantitative research. Also, in this particular case there has been a lot of room for objectivity, which is shown in the analysis of the results. Not many concrete results can be measured either, as the main event is held in summer of 2015, and for example the number of attendees will not be confirmed until the beginning of 2015.

6.1 Success of the street promotion

The main goal for the street promotion (the promotional truck tour around Helsinki city center) was to grab the attention of citizens of Helsinki, and introduce them to what will be the greatest festival in summer of 2015 – taking place in their home city.

As even the objectives were not defined very specifically, finding the ways to measure the success was even more challenging. Also, the nature of this way of promotion made it more difficult to analyse: the main point in doing a street promotion is the element of surprise, which is exactly the thing that makes it so memorable and effective way of promotion. For this reason for example research by questionnaires would have been difficult to execute. Also, as we did not know our audience beforehand in more detail than just the people who happen to be outside around Helsinki city centre during the event, we couldn’t have known who to interview before and after the promotion to see the effect.

For this reason the success of the street promotion was analysed mainly based on observations, by me objectively as well as other participants who I had discussions with after the promotion.

One of the things the analysis was based on was the amount of people at the places where we stopped with our truck. For the most part they were hugely successful. For example at Hietalahden tori the market place was crowded with people, as well as in many other places we stopped at. This means that the spots were successfully chosen considering the day (Saturday) and time of the day (around 1 pm).

Another observation made during the street promotion was peoples' reactions. The success could not only be based on the number of people, as that does not give us any information about the image we managed to communicate to our audience. Based on my observations, and the discussions with other organizers, all feedback was positive. This could also be seen in simple things such as peoples' faces: many smiles and happy waving as we drove by people on the streets. Also, after the dancers had performed their routine, the crowd would invariably clap and cheer for the team.

Analysing the peoples' reactions even further, it can be stated that the element of surprise was achieved, as the reactions our truck got were for the most part surprised. People would laugh as they realised what it was all about. Here one of the main features of effective Guerrilla marketing, surprise, was fulfilled.

From these observations the conclusion could be made that the street promotion was successful to achieve the goals set to it. First of all, we managed to 'hit the spots' where we could find large audiences in order to grab the attention of as many people as possible. Secondly, the message we communicated was what we were aiming for. People were engaged and we created the atmosphere of fun, joy and togetherness. As stated before in the theory part of this thesis, engaging people and making them feel like a part of something bigger is one efficient way to make your message memorable, and that was achieved here as well.

The main issue with the street promotion seemed to be the clarity of our message. Even though we most certainly managed to create the right feeling and the atmosphere, it remained a bit unclear how well the actual content, the information about Gymnaestrada 2015 – festival, was received. Even though we did have the hostess who would introduce the festival, it is impossible to know whether people actually internalized that information, rather than just follow the spectacle and enjoy the entertainment.

This being said, I do believe that this street promotion was a valuable add to the entire promotion process of Gymnaestrada 2015, as it could later be associated with the festival itself creating already memories to people who were a part of it. This helps to build the story behind the 'brand' and make it valuable for the audience.

6.2 Success of the social media promotion

Compared to the street promotion, the social media, Facebook and Twitter, are a lot easier to analyse. Mostly, the results are based on the number of likes, shares and comments for everything we posted. We did not set any specific goals when it comes to these numbers, so analysing the success is not as straight forward as it could have been. However, as our main goal was to keep our followers posted and make them feel engaged with the process, the numbers are not that relevant.

In Facebook our posts did receive reasonable visibility reaching the following volumes:

- Photo album with pictures of the truck tour: 125 likes, shared 25 times
- Promotion video with the promotional dance: 104 likes, shared 25 times, 6 comments
- Two other posts about the street promotion together: 208 likes, shared 25 times

With Twitter the numbers did not prove any huge success. All the posts, four altogether, made to Twitter on the opening day of the Gymnaestrada – Twitter account (wg_2015) collected 3 re-tweets and 10 Favorite –markings, which is quite a small number. However, as these were the first tweets ever made by Gymnaestrada 2015, the low number of followers should not be taken too seriously. First, you have to educate your followers and make them find you, only then can you expect better visibility for your brand.

The aspect of real-time communication was not taken full advantage of in this project. This was mostly due to the lack of planning and the limited time for preparations. The decision was made that the main focus would be executing the street promotion, and attention to social media would be paid when possible during the day. Perhaps having more people in the project would have helped in order to be more active in social media during the day.

In conclusion, the Facebook posts seemed to fulfil the objectives set out for them. With Twitter the outcome was not anything spectacular, but at least the account was now opened and could be developed in the future.

6.3 How to choose the right promotional tool?

The two different promotional tools of this research differ from each other significantly. It is important to understand the nature of these tools in order to be able to choose the right tool for your purposes. One of the main issues is the target market: it is crucial to know your target market well to choose the media and tools that really reach the audience you want to reach.

What I have learned during this process, is that these days people really crave for more interaction and participation. They feel the need to be a part of something bigger, while still maintaining their own brand identity. To answer to this need many companies have chosen to go on-line and use social media to engage people. This is a great way to reach a large audience with minimum effort and also with a small budget. It has also been seen as a modern way of marketing for a long time. However, in my opinion as the social media marketing has increased massively, it has also become boring and basic: it does not grab the audience's attention unless it is something really different - which is quite difficult to come up with, as so many things have already been done.

As every brand, product, service and event seems to have at least a Facebook page and a Twitter –account, it is actually the other promotional tools that have become more attractive and above all more memorable for people. For example, a Facebook page for a beverage is not nearly as memorable as actually giving out samples of that very beverage at for example the Central Railway Station. I also think people have become aware of the easiness and effortlessness of social media, as they use it themselves to create events and for example fan pages. When something is actually brought in front of their eyes, they appreciate the effort and work that has done to make it happen.

In conclusion, social media can be a great option if you want to reach a large audience easily and with a low budget. However, it does not necessarily create the personalised and memorable experience for the audience as a street promotion might.

6.4 Validity and reliability of the research

The validity and reliability of a research is often associated with only quantitative research. However, there has to be a way to analyse these things in a qualitative research as well. One way to make the reader understand the results and conclusions the researcher has made especially in a case study research is to describe the places, people and events as specifically as possible. The reliability of a research is enhanced by the researcher's thorough explanation about the implementing of the process. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara, 2005, 216-217).

As a researcher it is impossible to ever be entirely objective. Especially in qualitative research the researcher should openly acknowledge their own subjectivity. The results and conclusions are always based on the researcher's own values and research orientation. The problem with analysing the reliability is that even though somebody could replicate the research you have made, the results would unlikely be the same; even though the environment and circumstances were similar.

(Daymon & Holloway, 2002, 88-90)

In this research I have aimed to introduce the process and the conditions as clearly as possible to clarify to the readers the environment where the research was made and how I draw my conclusions from it. I have also compared my own conclusions and findings with opinions of other participants in the process. As this is a qualitative research, it does not even pursue to reach pure facts, but to research the case from one person's perspective and to observe phenomenon. The subjectivity has been recognized already from the start of this process to decrease its effects in the reliability of the research and to make this thesis as valid as any other research conducted in a similar way.

6.5 Thesis process and personal learning experience

This thesis was executed in a reasonable time period from the summer 2014 to fall of the same year. After receiving the assignment from Voimisteluliitto the work started immediately and was already completed quite rapidly. The writing process did not immediately follow, which was due to the author's tight schedule. However, this might have been actually a better way, as there was some time to go through ideas and to internalize the process to narrow it down to the things that actually matter for this thesis.

Assessing my own learning experience I would say that the most important skill I learned was self-management. As this thesis was completed independently, it was me that was

accountable for all aspects of the process. Time management did not become a problem, as a precise time schedule was produced early on in the process.

The project itself was very interesting and fun, as I couldn't have believed earlier that I could actually make my thesis about my number one passion in life, gymnastics. Even though the writing process was from time to time really exhausting, my personal interest to the topic made it quite pleasant after all. Also, being able to combine my skills in marketing communication with gymnastics, gave me a lot of ideas about possible future careers.

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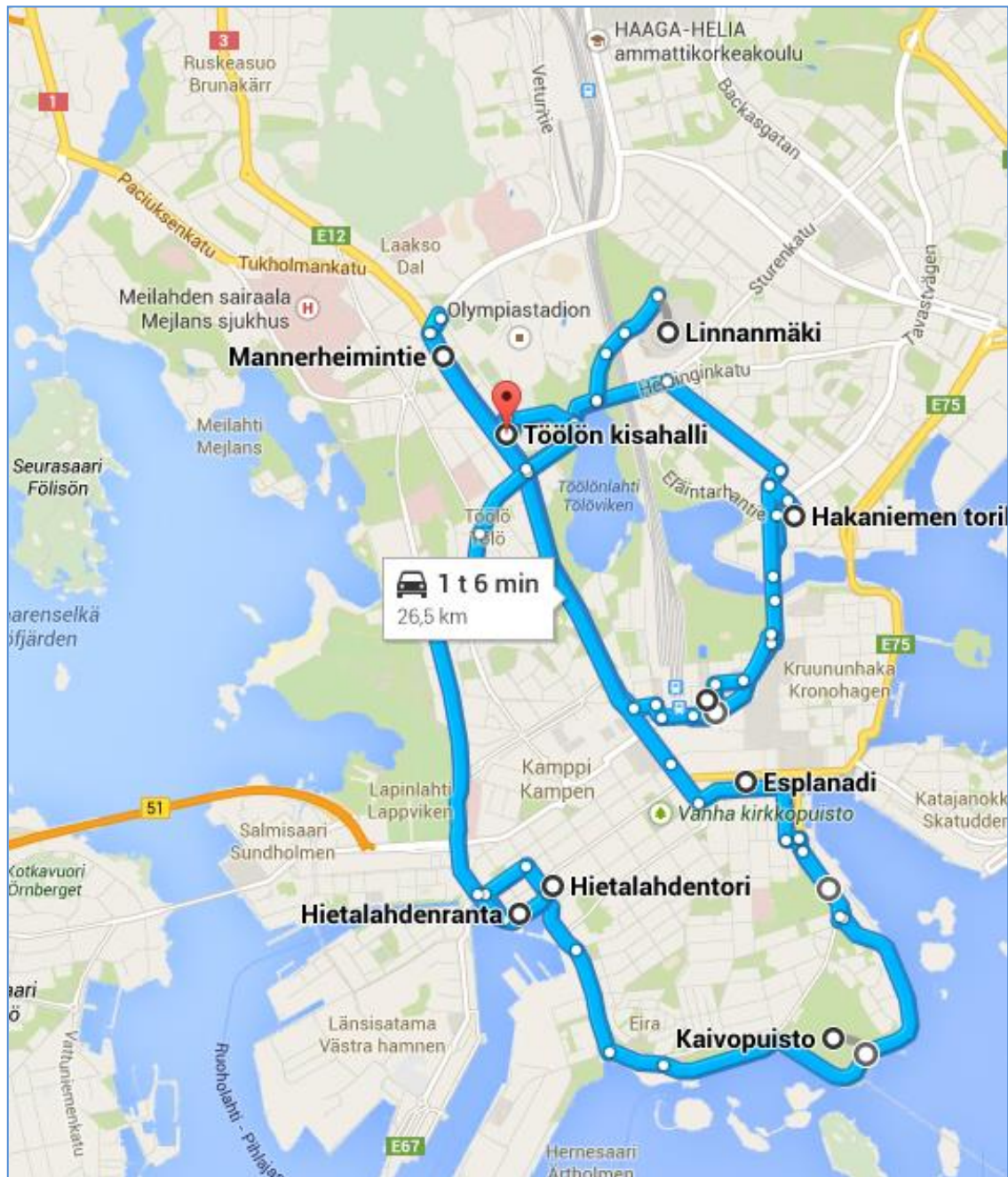
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Attachments

Attachment 1. The route of the promotional truck tour on a map.



Viestintäsuunnitelma 12.7.

| FACEBOOK | TWITTER |
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| <p>*klo 9.55: Good morning! It's one year to go to the World Gymnaestrada 2015 Helsinki! Today these girls will be cruising around Helsinki city center in this truck and promoting the greatest festival of summer 2015!</p> <p>Come and join us, our first stop will be at Rautatientori (/the Central railway station) in just few minutes!</p> <p>p.s. You can follow our day also in Twitter @wg2015 (kuva tytöistä rekan lavalla tms.)</p> <p>klo 11: At the moment we are at Linnanmäki, an amusement park in the heart of the city. A nice way to spend a summery day in Helsinki! On the background you can see the most popular ride of the park: the Old Rollercoaster, built in 1951. Who dares to jump in? Tilannekuva tytöistä lintsillä</p> <p>*klo 12.00 Our last stop will be at Espaa stage to celebrate the one year to go milestone of World Gymnaestrada 2015 Helsinki. See you there at 16.30! https://www.facebook.com/events/1448850072034656/?fref=ts</p> | <p>klo 9.55: Today we will spread the joy of #gymnastics @Helsinki! You can spot us in the city center, next stop Rautatientori. #WG2015 #Helsinki (eri kuva kuin Faceen?)</p> <p>klo 11.00: Great vibes @Linnanmäki! On a sunny day in Helsinki this is the place to be! #fun #summer #lintsi fiilistely kuva?</p> <p>Klo 12.00 : Continuing our truck cruising in #kaivopuisto! This is one of the places to relax and have a picnic after a long day of #gymnastics ;) #Helsinki #kaivari kuva Kaivarista?</p> |

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| <p>klo 12.30: Spreading the joy of gymnastics to the people at Hietsu beach, one of the biggest beaches in Helsinki. You wouldn't believe it, but we have great beaches here too! Mahd. videoklippi</p> <p>klo 14.00: This week there has been a huge football tournament for junior players in Helsinki, (täggää tapahtuma tähän) Helsinki-Cup, and we got to be a part of it. Today was the day of the finale, congrats for the winners! (kuva tanssista stadionilla)</p> <p>suomiversio, jos tarvetta postata Suomeksi esim. tapahtumasivulla?: Gymnaestrada mukana myös HesaCupissa, finaalipäivänä tunnelma oli korkealla! Onnittelut voitosta *****! (tähän en keksinyt mitään fiksua!)</p> <p>klo 15.00: FB-kuvakilpailun voittaja Last two weeks you have been liking and voting hard on our Facebook-page for the photo which is the best to represent the Gymnaestrada spirit. And right now we have a winner with xxx likes!</p> <p>voittajan nimi won VIP tickets for two persons to FIG gala on July 2015! Congratulations! (voittajakuva)</p> | <p>12.30/13.00 : This is how #gymnasts sunbathe ;) A quick stop at one of the best beaches in #Helsinki! #hietsu #beach #summer (kuva tytöistä erilaisissa asennoissa, esim. spagaatti, silta ym ottamassa aurinkoa)</p> <p>klo 14.00: We a visiting the Helsinki-Cup, a huge football tournament for junior players! #HesaCup #finale #Helsinki (kuva)</p> <p>14.15: Gymnaestrada mukana myös HesaCupissa, finaalipäivänä tunnelma oli korkealla! Onnittelut voitosta *****! (jos suomalainen voittaja, laitetaan suomeksi vielä erikseen omat onnittelut. Täggää voittajataho, jos ovat Twitterissä)</p> <p>15.00: Now heading to Espo stage to finish the day with this great event: (tähän linkki Faceen) Come join us and let's #MakeTheEarthMove! @Espanlava #esplanadi #Helsinki (kuva kengistä tms. matkalla espalle)</p> |
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| <p>klo 15.00 / vähän klo 16 ennen We are on our way to Espa stage, come and join us at 16.30! (perään linkki tapahtumaan) https://www.facebook.com/events/1448850072034656/?fref=ts</p> <p>Kuva rekan lavalta. (tämän kuvan otan varmaan jo aiemmin matkan varrelta)</p> | <p>16.30: Its about to start! A full hour of great #gymnastics performances and #WG2015Helsinki hype! #Gymnaestrada #WG2015</p> |
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